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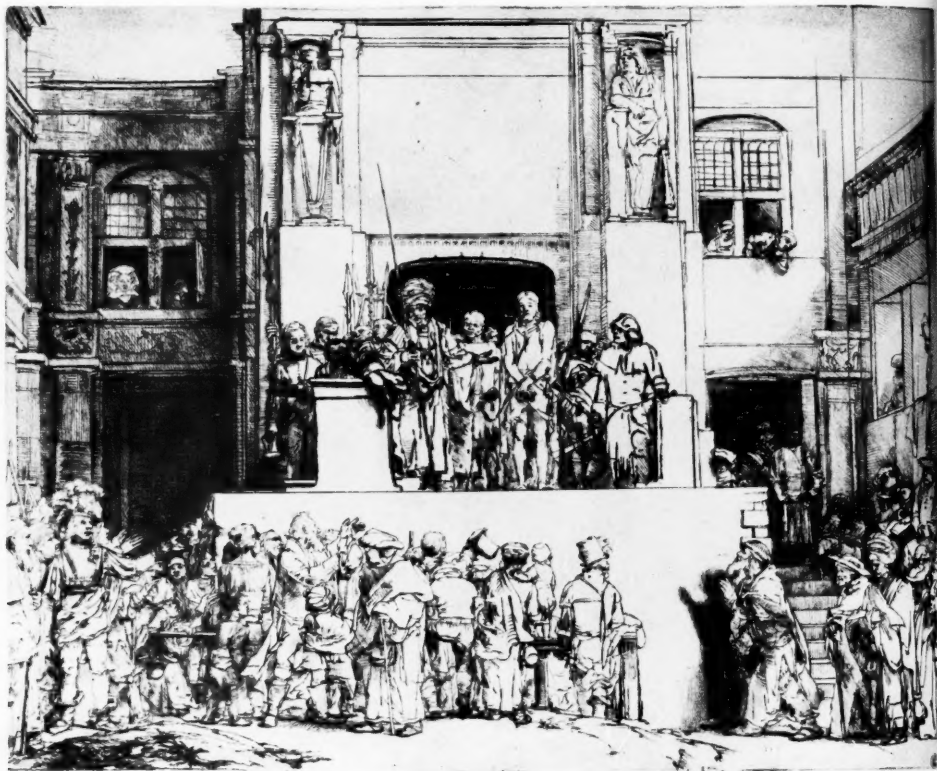


FIG. 1. Rembrandt, *Christ Presented to the People*, etching, fourth state  
reproduced by courtesy of the Henry E. Huntington Library & Art Gallery, San Marino, California

Cover: Rembrandt, *Christ Presented to the People*, etching, seventh state (Detail)

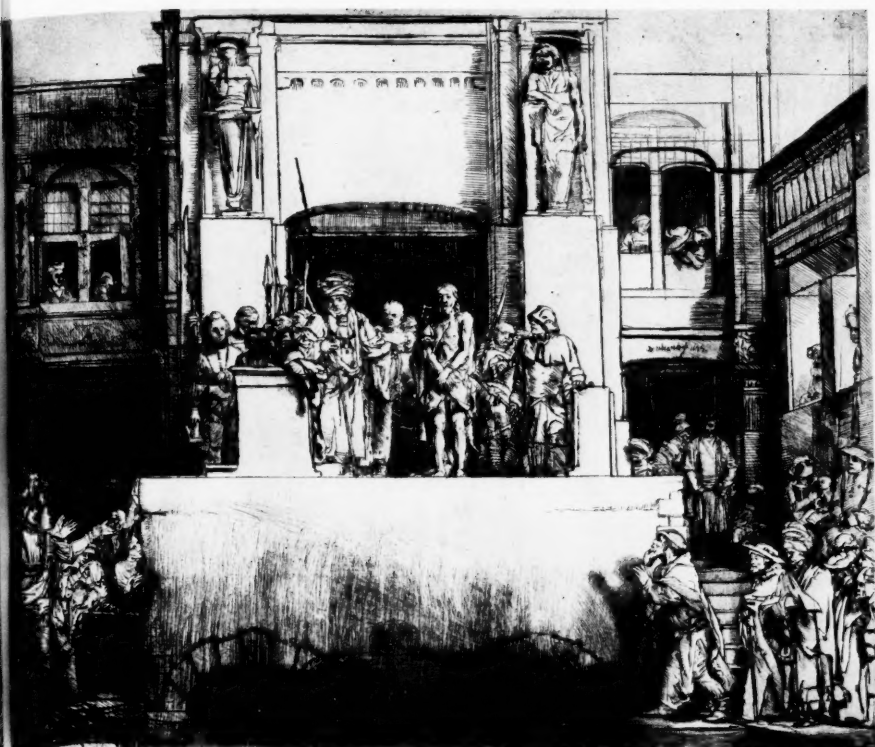


FIG. 2. Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669): *Christ Presented to the People*, etching, seventh state. L2100.A.13.61-125 Museum Associates Purchase, the Balch Fund

## REMBRANDT: *Christ Presented to the People*

IT HAS BEEN SAID that only in his etchings are we permitted to watch the mind of Rembrandt at work in its germinating process of creativity. In no other examples is this process so manifest as in the two greatest of his late plates, the *Three Crosses* (Hind 270) and *Christ Presented to the People* (Hind 271).

The *Three Crosses*, which bears the date of 1653 in the third state only, is the *chef-d'œuvre* of Rembrandt's etchings. The fourth state is assigned to the period between 1653-54. In the following year, 1655, he undertook what is considered the

FIG. 3. Christ  
Presented to the  
People. seventh  
state. Detail



pendant to this print, the *Ecce Homo*, or *Christ Presented to the People*. As late as 1661, eight years before his death, he concluded the final state of the *Three Crosses*. In these two largest of his plates Rembrandt incorporated the greatest amount of progressive alteration to be found in his graphic work; and in them he employed the medium of drypoint to the greatest degree that is also to be found in his prints.

What were the reasons for the prolonged and profound changes which Rembrandt particularly made in these two compositions?

In the fourth state of the *Three Crosses* Rembrandt transformed the composition of the first three states into an almost completely new picture. He sought to concentrate all the significance of the event on the figure of Christ, and reduced the number of surrounding figures, heightening the effects of light and dark by long streams of drypoint which traverse the plate in the most dramatic way. The interchange of their directions and layers, and the variety and depth of the hatching screens give the work a tonal expressiveness and drawn effect unparalleled in etching. The rich and heavy inking of this drypoint creates an atmosphere of intense tragedy, and illustrates Rembrandt's consummate command of that *chiaroscuro* which was his means of conveying the utmost profundity of mood.

Between the third and fourth state of this plate, Rembrandt worked on the companion-piece, also in oblong format (14 x 17 ¾ inches), *Christ Presented to the People*. The problems of this latter composition were solved in a different way than those of the former. In the initial undertaking of the *Three Crosses* the central motif

was the conversion of the centurion at the foot of the cross. In the final state his position is altered and his role almost submerged in the effacing of the active, expressive groups around Christ. *Christ Presented to the People* was correspondingly conceived as a crowded scene, the heaviest massing grouped before the tribune on which Christ and Pilate stand. Rembrandt continued with this composition intact, save for minor changes, for four states, as we can see from the beautiful impression of the rare fourth state here reproduced (Fig. 1).<sup>\*</sup> He then eliminated the group before the platform completely, and intensified its architectural quality by adding two arches below it. By taking out the foreground crowd he allowed the eye to go undistractedly to the central group on the tribune, and the spectator to enter directly into the presentation in progress. In the fifth state he added three figures to the left of the tribune, which increased the depth and interest of that previously unactivated area. The plate also became progressively darker through increased shading and drypoint—possibly to reinforce a certain deterioration which had ensued—thus strengthening the solidity of the architecture and intensifying the dramatic quality. The crowds in the *Three Crosses*, where they have not been removed, are subdued in the heavy shadows, especially on the right, which also masks

<sup>\*</sup>Thanks are expressed to the Henry E. Huntington Library & Art Gallery, and to William A. Parish, curator of prints, for furnishing this photograph.



FIG. 4. *Christ Presented to the People*. seventh state. Detail



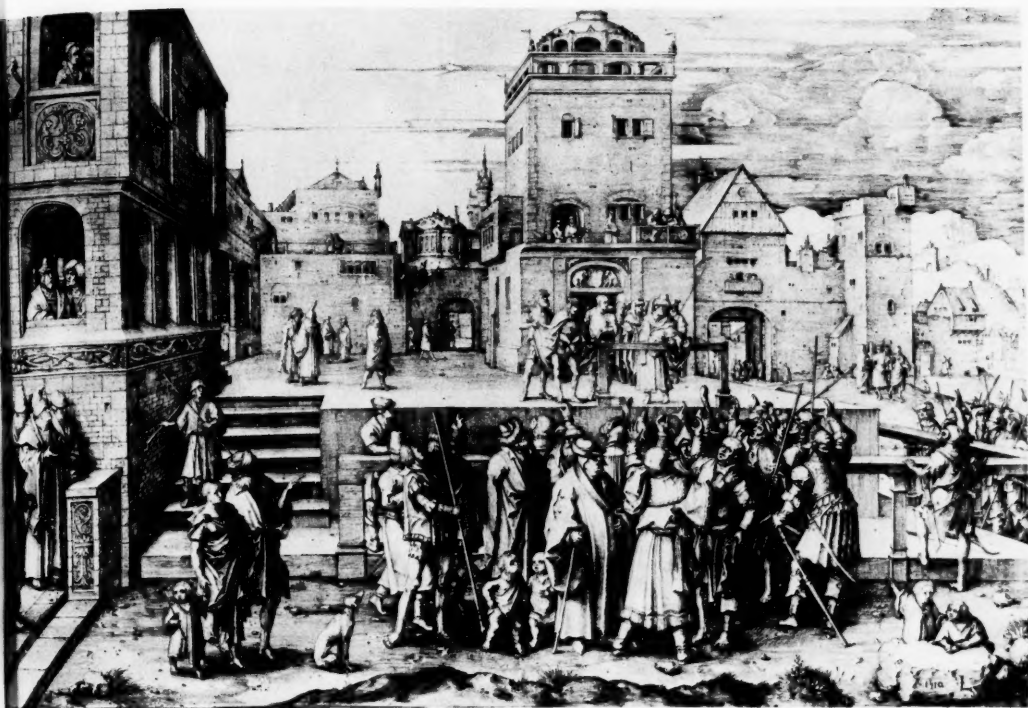
out the thief on the cross; and thus in both prints Rembrandt through different ways eventually reduced, or obscured, the number of participants in the scenes in order to strike, as it were, broader and more forceful chords of the essential.

William M. Ivins Jr., whose penetrating writing on prints can scarcely be rivalled, said of Rembrandt's work on the two plates, "He brought each through a series of small changes to completion and then ruthlessly subjected each to such radical alteration that it became a different picture. No greater sacrifices than these can be found in all the history of the graphic arts, and no greater masterpieces than those achieved at their cost."

Like the *Three Crosses*, *Christ Presented to the People* was not an underived composition. Here, instead of the largely Italian antecedents of the former, the artist based his composition predominantly on a great engraving by his early 16th century conational, Lucas van Leyden, the *Ecce Homo*, (Bartsch 71) Fig. 5. In this plate, however, the vociferous crowd in the foreground is actually the dominant focus of the composition, with Christ a relatively small figure in the second plane, almost overshadowed by the buildings behind him. As Rembrandt from the start made the figure of Christ large and directly frontal, the crowd below, especially as their forms with lightly shaded outlines are largely white against the stark white and glaring wall of the tribune, competed too actively with the scene represented above, and was consequently inevitably burnished away.

To the well known influence also of Callot's etching, the *Presentation to the People*, Fig. 6, from his *Large Passion* (1618-21), Münz has added another prototype for Rembrandt's composition, Nicolaes de Bruyn's engraving, *Ecce Homo* of 1618, Fig. 7. In both prints, crowds prevail, although in better proportion and relationship to the main motif than Rembrandt originally envisaged for his composition. All three prototypal compositions, including the Lucas van Leyden, are marked by their massive architectural backgrounds, and Rembrandt continued this setting for his own heroic presentation. It is, in fact, the most striking and overwhelming use of an architectural *mis-en-scène* to be found in his etched work, rivalled only by the interior of the *Medea* of 1648, and the most stagelike scene of all.

The site of Rembrandt's scene is a courtyard with loggias along the upper sides. The style of building and the ornament are Renaissance. The chief protagonists appear on what seems like a stage before an architectural façade, and it is to be wondered if the popular Netherlandish *tableaux vivants* of the times with such façades were not a pattern for Rembrandt's theatrical presentation. Highly placed on square columns on either side of the central door of the tribune are two niches with statues, one of blindfold Justice, the other of Hercules with lion skin and club. What was the



reason for the choice of the figure of Hercules as a motif for this scene? The Greek god had a symbolical meaning in the 17th century. According to Ripa's *Iconologia* of 1618, Hercules with lion skin and club represented *Virtu Heroica*, as well as *Virtu dell' Animo* (soul). It is possible that Rembrandt intended by his choice of the figures of Justice and Heroic Virtue to emphasize the pathos of the scene enacted below.

By the third state of the print Rembrandt had already added a balustrade at the upper right, and the background was shaded from that state onward. In the sixth state he broke up the blankness of the tribune wall by drawing in two large arches, such as perhaps suggest a dungeon, and also a bearded bust between them, representing a river god as a fountain, an added decorative feature for his classical setting. Coppier interpreted the arches as a double cloaca. In this state he also signed and dated the print. The bust was then in the seventh and final state quite covered over with horizontal lines, appearing like a ghostly apparition.

In its balance and symmetry, the plate is one of Rembrandt's most "classical," least "baroque" compositions, one in which he combined massive architecture and

FIG. 5.  
Lucas van Leyden:  
Ecce Homo  
(Courtesy of The  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
Dick Fund, 1927)

FIG. 6.  
Jacques Callot:  
Ecce Homo  
(Courtesy of Rudolf  
A. Baumsfeld  
Los Angeles)



figures in the most harmonious way, achieving a monumental effect. In size and format a counterpart to the *Three Crosses*, it is in every other respect distinctly opposite. The former takes place, as it were, against a timeless background, and in the later states its emotional turbulence is sheathed in a network of shadows whose atmosphere evokes that state of being which mystics call "the dark night of the soul." In contrast, *Christ Presented to the People* is a monument of another kind, a powerful but restrained drama as of calm before an unleashed storm. The great architectural setting and space enclose and hold steady their scene which is conversely in the *Three Crosses*, convulsively acted out in an eternal setting; the last state is without any trace of human background. Its blinding earlier effulgence gives way to the late streaks and sheets of visionary light and dark which were achieved by very deep and wide strokes of drypoint drawn with slashing angularity. This agitated, febrile ripping of the plate does not appear in *Christ Presented to the People*. The drypoint lines are generally thin and fine throughout except on the left where the weight of the





FIG. 7.  
Nicolaes de Bruyn:  
*Ecce Homo*,  
detail (Courtesy of  
The Metropolitan  
Museum of Art,  
Whittelsey Fund,  
1951)

shadows is thrown, and here we see some of the heavier, uneven strokes which after inking give the dark velvety tone which so enrich the plate.

The impression of the plate recently acquired for the Print Department, of the seventh and final state (Fig. 2) is of uniformly excellent quality and condition. It has been in the collection of Dr. Edward Peart (c. 1756–1824 [Lugt 892]) once a student in Leyden, Rembrandt's birthplace. On paper with the watermark grapes, it preserves to the highest degree the burr of the drypoint, the principal medium of the work, and the most perishable in later impressions. The *Three Crosses* and *Christ Presented to the People* represent this technique at its epitome in the history of the engraving art, and its last employment by Rembrandt in his career. With the entrance of this superb graphic achievement into the Print Department, a rare masterwork becomes the cornerstone for the Museum's developing Rembrandt etching collection.

EBRIA FEINBLATT

## A SEYMOUR SIDEBOARD



FIG. 1. American sideboard in the Sheraton style, mahogany with inlays, grey marble top and "butler's" drawer, made c. 1800 by John & Thomas Seymour of Boston. Museum Associates Purchase, the Balch Fund

IN AMERICAN FURNITURE of the Federal period (about 1785-1815) things everywhere were flourishing. Work might still be advertised as "after the newest and most approved London patterns" (William Challen, 1797) but the cry was now to "Buy American!" and thereby encourage every sort of domestic industries. Our battle for political independence had been won, and in the prevailing atmosphere of intense national pride the prestige of imported articles gave way to a preference for our own manufactures. Newspapers overspilled with the notices of chair and cabinet-makers hopefully commencing business, and determined "to sell at the lowest prices, that work of equal goodness sells at" (Thomas Burling, 1796).

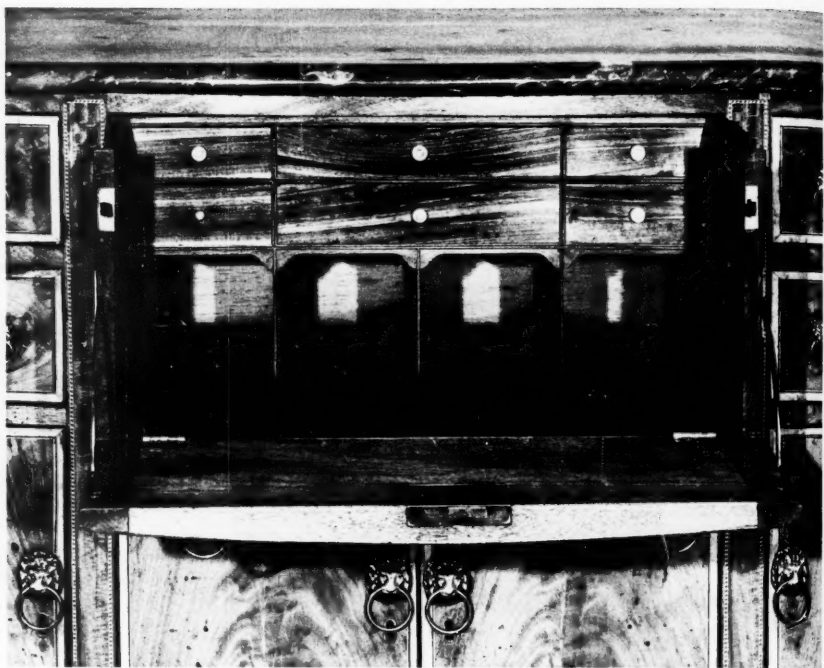
And not content with the patronage at hand, enterprising city workmen looked to wider markets: "Orders from the country will be carefully attended to and thankfully received" (Timpson & Gilmor, 1793), and "Masters of vessels may be supplied at the shortest notice" (Jacob Vander Pool in 1783, John De Witt in 1798) to serve an active coastal trade and exports to the West Indies.

In their accustomed way, many cabinetworkers conducted a sideline in the way of "Paperhanging on the shortest notice" (1785) or the making of window "cornishes" and Venetian blinds (1794) or general upholstery. William Dove (1798) served two rôles, supplying "every article in the Cabinet makery and upholstery line," while Gifford & Scotland (1791) advertised "Funeral Work perform'd." Lumberyards were an adjunct to many cabinetshops, selling "boards and joice" (joists) for housebuilding, and every cabinet wood from "boilstead" (bilsted, or gumwood) and common "country woods" (native pine and poplar) to "a cargo of choice St. Domingoes logs" (San Domingo mahogany).

If furniture formerly had been made to special order or "bespoke," or else must be acquired at "publick vendue" (the auctions of used household goods), there now appeared such obliging makers as Thomas Burling, who "has opened a Ware Room of mahogany and Ready Made Furniture, on a more extensive plan than heretofore; and for the convenience of Strangers and others, who may resort to or settle in this city, he means to keep an assortment where they may be supplied on the shortest notice; for it must hurt the feelings of every citizen to observe the daily imposition strangers are liable to, in purchasing new furniture at these publick vendues" (New York, 1787). The cabinetshop that kept on hand a selection of readymade pieces was a new convenience, patterned after those great London establishments (describing themselves as "house furnishers") whose workshops and showrooms were from the 1780s multiplying along Oxford Street and the Strand. Thomas and William Ash (1787) now had "ready at the Ware-House" a stock of neat windsor chairs and settees "equal to any mahogany, and comes much cheaper," and John Dikeman's workrooms in Beekman Street, New York (1794) set forth "a handsome assortment of Fashionable Furniture."

Now as never before in American furniture, one began to see constantly repeated versions of the accepted models, quantity produced though by no means factory-made. Conditions in the colonies, when communications were poor and cabinetworkers must improvise from perhaps imperfectly remembered models, had fostered the development of hybrid and rather old-fashioned types; but nowadays, ideas were taken directly from the published London design books of Hepplewhite (the *Guide*, 1788 and '94) and Sheraton (the *Drawing-Book*, 1791-94).<sup>1</sup> The tendency

FIG. 2.  
Interior of  
fall-front  
"butler's"  
drawer



was always to simplify and eliminate, developing an American idiom that had marked regional variations, yet a certain uniformity was established in such popular models as the bowfront chest, so-called Martha Washington chair, dropleaf "pembroke" tables or Sheraton inlaid card tables.

With styles becoming standardized, everyone knew what to expect of the advertised "soffas & chairs both Plain and Inlaid," the Hepplewhite "Burjar chairs" (bergères) in 1786, the dining and "pembroke" tables (pembrokes) or inlaid "wine keepers" (cellarettes). Rare were the creative men like Duncan Phyfe of New York or John Seymour in Boston, who followed the stream of fashion but produced "new" designs with a difference.

A distinguished example is the mahogany sideboard seen here,<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1) a Boston Salem variant of the Sheraton type, belonging to "the relatively rare class of American slab-top furniture" and apparently the only known American sideboard of its period with a marble top.<sup>3</sup>

Marble-topped or "slab" tables had been highly regarded through most of the 18th century,<sup>4</sup> particularly as sideboard tables in the dining parlor, as pier-tables and

night stands, or as "mixing boards" for the preparation of hot beverages,—that is, wherever braziers and other food warmers, the spirit-lamp for brandy warming, or the burning night-lamp might spoil the wooden tops of furniture.<sup>5</sup>

From the cost of marbles and the difficulty of procuring them, customers were expected to supply their own, the cabinet-maker then charging them for "making a Frame for a Slab." Italian and sometimes French marbles were imported, but native varieties were quarried in New England and New York State, and near Philadelphia. Our sideboard shows a molded slab of grey-veined pale New England marble.

Marble-topped side tables are familiar enough, and a few American mixing tables or small sideboards for the dining room occur at the end of the 18th century, these latter mostly attributed to the Boston cabinetmaker John Seymour.<sup>6</sup> But the full-size sideboard is a prime rarity. Our own can

be attributed to the Seymours on the basis of design, points of construction, the character of its inlaid decoration, and its distinctive use of interior woods.

John Seymour (1738–1818) was English born, coming with his wife and eight children from Axminster, Devon, to Falmouth (now Portland) Maine, in November 1785. Here he worked until 1794 with his young sons John (1756–1791/94, by a first wife Grace Lombard) and Thomas (1771–1848, by the second wife Jane Brice). In 1794 he moved to Boston, working until 1815/16 with his son Thomas.<sup>7</sup> They were titled John Seymour "& Son" from 1798, and when the father retired, Thomas continued until 1843.

The combined careers of father and son almost exactly coincided with that of the New York cabinetmaker Duncan Phyfe.<sup>8</sup> Phyfe, who worked from the early 1790s until 1847, was a master of furniture design and fine carving, while the Seymours preferred a use of inlaid ornament. Accordingly, while they drew upon the same Hepplewhite, Sheraton and Regency sources, they developed very different and distinctive styles.

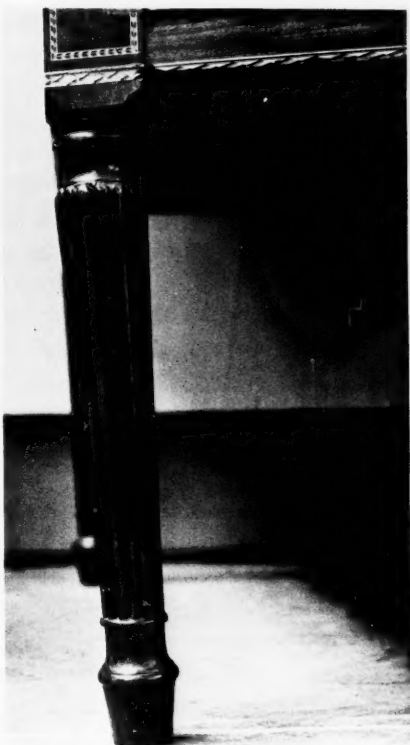


FIG. 3.  
Detail of  
turned and  
reeded leg



Thomas Seymour the son was an enterprising fellow, who in 1804 opened the Boston Furniture Warehouse, on Common Street at the foot of the Mall. Here (said his first advertisement) "the Cabinet business is carried on in all its branches, and any article made on the shortest notice," but he also operated a commission establishment, taking used furniture in trade and keeping "constantly on hand a good assortment of every article necessary to furnish the house completely." His was one of the new-style furnishing houses, which in January 1805 advertised "Elegant Fashionable Upholstery...executed by a Person from London," not forgetting "Carpetings of every description" and the wallpapering business (with stylish "Bordered Italian and French paper hangings"). The following June he extended himself to include "English, Philadelphia, and Boston made COACHES, CHAISES of every description. Also a few second hand Chaises,—Carriages received & sold on Commission."

The next year, Seymour was advertising for workmen and apprentices. Nor was he without competition from other ware rooms in the neighborhood. William Leverett "at the head of the Mall" advertised extensively, taking a swipe at Seymour by insisting that his own furniture was "by the first town workmen, whatever may be said by *some cabinet makers* to the *contrary*, notwithstanding."

The Boston Furniture Warehouse prospered until 1808, when a general decline of business followed from Jefferson's retaliatory moves against the British (the Embargo Act of 1807). But by 1812, Seymour had recovered enough to open new premises called the Boston Cabinet Manufactory, employing a staff of workers and offering "Useful, and Ornamental Cabinet Furniture all made by or under the direction of Thomas Seymour."

This second establishment lasted until 1816, presumably with the father John Seymour in quiet partnership. The last Boston Directory listing of "John Seymour, cabinetmaker" had appeared in 1813. He would seem to have retired by 1816, and in August 1818 one "Seymore" died at the Almshouse, a refuge for the aged and debilitated.<sup>9</sup>

These were the distinguished father and energetic son to whom our sideboard can be accredited. In the tradition of Boston/Salem cabinetworkers, who from about 1800 shifted from the Hepplewhite to a distinctive regional interpretation of the Sheraton style, it displays features pointing to the Seymour shop, and in the "best" period when the father's taste still predominated.

Made of mahogany, and its bowed front with plume-figured veneers sun-faded to a greyed amber tone, it carries a conforming slab top with molded edge and stands on six turned and reeded legs. Though no exact match is found, the turnings of these (Fig. 3) compare closely with the well known Metropolitan Museum chairs by Sey-

mour, Plate 211 in Stoneman. Four cupboard doors and four small drawers show inlaid ebony stringing and maple or stainwood borders. The stiles and skirt carry two patterns of inlaid banding, one of them (Stoneman, Plate 266) the same as on the famous labelled Seymour tambour desk in the du Pont Collections at Winterthur. The gilt brasses are a lion's head and ring in two sizes, "the favorite brasses of the Seymours after the turn of the century."

An exceptional feature of our sideboard is the fitted pull-out "butler's" drawer for writing, its hinged front letting down on brass quadrants (Fig. 2). Chalked in script on the outside back is a shop note *Secretary drawer back*.

As customary in Seymour's work, a variety of woods are found in the interior construction. Most of the lining wood is pine, but the four small drawers employ chestnut. Six small drawers within the "butler's" compartment are built of thin mahogany, faced with rosewood and fitted with small ivory knobs. The dovetailing throughout is of that beautifully thin and precise cutting seen, Plates 290-291, in Stoneman.

GREGOR NORMAN-WILCOX

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Charles Watts, a Charleston cabinetmaker, was one advertising in 1797 for journeymen workers from England, undertaking to pay passage money "for whoever chuses to come" and at a rate of wages "seventy-five percent advance on the New London book of Cabinet prices, published in 1793." This was the indispensable *Cabinetmaker's London Book of Prices*, issued from 1788 in many editions.

<sup>2</sup> Museum Associates purchase, the Balch Fund, accession number L.2100.55.A.13-3. Top  $26\frac{1}{4} \times 54\frac{3}{4}$  inches, height 38 inches. Published *frontispiece* and p. 337 in *Antiques* for April 1957.

<sup>3</sup> A plain marble-topped Hepplewhite sideboard was pictured inside cover of *Antiques* for May 1952.

<sup>4</sup> Mable Munson Swan, "American Slab Tables," pp. 40-43 in *Antiques* for January 1953.

<sup>5</sup> Examples are seen in Edwin J. Hipkiss, *18th-Century American Arts: The M. & M. Karolik Collection* (1941), Nos. 50-53; in Joseph Downs, *American Furniture: Queen Anne and Chippendale Periods, in the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum* (1952), Nos. 351 and 353-363; and in *Baltimore Furniture* (1947), an exhibition

catalogue of the Baltimore Museum of Art, Nos. 31-33, 35 and 46.

<sup>6</sup> Nos. 91, 93, 111 and 113 in Vernon C. Stoneman, *John and Thomas Seymour: Cabinetmakers in Boston, 1794-1816* (1959). An exception is the fine tambour-closed Baltimore mixing-table in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, shown No. 46 in *Baltimore Furniture*.

<sup>7</sup> Their shop was in Creek Lane, with Thomas later removing to Common Street (1805), Congress Street (1813) and Washington Street (1820-42).

<sup>8</sup> With the recent appearance of Mr Stoneman's definitive work, Phyfe and the Seymours become the only early American cabinetmakers to be honored with a whole book to themselves. The former's present-day reputation came from Charles Over Cornelius, *Furniture Masterpieces of Duncan Phyfe* (1923) and Nancy McClelland, *Duncan Phyfe and the English Regency* (1939).

<sup>9</sup> Our facts on the Seymours are from contemporary records, from Vernon C. Stoneman's book, and from a study by the present writer and Mrs. Russel Hastings, pp. 146-49 in *Antiques* for September 1941.

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*Catalogue of Paintings, II. "Flemish, German, Dutch and English Paintings, XV-XVII Century."* 1954. (88 pages, fully illustrated.) \$2.60

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